

'87

National/International Report

New Vatican document condemns artificial contraception

By Greg Erlanson

Vatican City (NC) — A new Vatican document on procreation rejects as morally illicit the procedures of in-vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood and experiments on human embryos.

Issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the 40-page document urges civil authorities to prohibit such practices as contrary to individual rights, family welfare and the institution of marriage.

It also criticizes some forms of prenatal diagnosis, embryo freezing and reproductive-cell donations.

However, the document — entitled "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation:

Replies to Certain Questions of the Day" — says techniques meant to "facilitate" the conjugal act are acceptable.

Dated February 22 and released by the Vatican March 10, the document was signed by the congregation's prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and its secretary, Archbishop Alberto Bovone.

The long-expected statement rejects any form of in-vitro fertilization (conception of life in the laboratory), even when it uses only the reproductive cells of the married couple utilizing the procedure.

In addition the document criticizes:

- Prenatal diagnosis in which the discovery of fetal defects may lead to abortion.
- Embryo experimentation that is "not directly therapeutic."

• Production of "spare" embryos for experimentation or commercial use.

• Freezing of embryos.

- Pre-selection of sex or other characteristics.
- Use of outside sperm or egg donors.
- Surrogate motherhood.

Underlying the entire document were two principles: 1) "The inviolability of the innocent human being's right to life from the moment of conception until death" and 2) The "special character" of the transmission of human life through sexual intercourse between married partners.

Prenatal diagnosis is morally licit if it aims at "safeguarding or healing" and subjects neither the mother nor the embryo to "disproportionate risks," it says.

The document, however, strongly condemns prenatal diagnosis when its findings may lead to abortion.

"A diagnosis which shows the existence of a malformation or a hereditary illness must not be the equivalent of a death sentence," it says.

In examining questions of human procreation, the document says the "the unborn child must be the fruit of marriage."

Surrogate motherhood — an arrangement by which a woman carries a baby to term for another person — is condemned as "an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood."

In-vitro fertilization, involving the conception of human life outside of the human body, is morally illicit because it is dissociated from the conjugal act, the document says.

It also "entrusts the life and the identity of the embryo to the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person," it adds.

While the document rejects without exception in-vitro fertilization and other reproductive techniques which "substitute for the conjugal act," it is open to practices which help the conjugal act attain "its natural purpose."

Police arrest two teenaged suspects in case of murdered Buffalo priests

Buffalo — Buffalo police have arrested a pair of neighborhood teenagers in connection with the stabbing deaths of two inner-city Catholic priests.

The body of 74-year-old Monsignor David P. Herlihy, former principal at Notre Dame High School in Batavia, was found on Saturday night, March 8, tied to a chair in the rectory of St. Matthew Catholic Church, where he lived.

Father A. Joseph Bissonette, 55, central-city vicar of the Diocese of Buffalo, was found Tuesday, February 24, in the rectory of St. Bartholomew Catholic Church, where he was pastor. Like Monsignor Herlihy, he had been tied to a chair and stabbed to death.

Money was found missing from both rectories after the slayings, according to Richard Donovan, chief of the Buffalo police homicide bureau.

Police arrested Milton Jones, 17, on Sunday night in Buffalo. Theodore Simmons, 18, was taken into custody on Monday in San Diego, Calif., where his brother lives.

Both suspects lived in the same east-side

Buffalo neighborhood where the priests were killed, according to a police spokesman. They are each charged with second-degree murder and first-degree robbery.

Donovan said that Jones has confessed to the murders.

At the time he was killed, Father Bissonette was sheltering two of the hundreds of refugees who are stranded at the U.S. border by Canada's new immigration regulations.

The two Salvadorans who had been staying at St. Bartholomew rectory were detained as material witnesses in the murder of Father Bissonette, but were never charged with the crime.

In a statement, Bishop Edward D. Head of Buffalo expressed gratitude for the work of law-enforcement officials and extended forgiveness to those who had committed both acts of violence.

"We pray that the spirit of forgiveness will teach us all to build a new community where violence is no more and life is richly valued," he said.

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